The Panchayati Raj Acts passed in Bihar and Pondicherry were challenged in the courts and the matter has been subjudice. The Governments of Bihar and Pondicherry have been advised to take steps for early disposal of the cases.

The Government of India have also been requesting the Government of Assam in regard to conducting Panchayat elections in the State, which are expected to be held in September-October, 2000. The Panchayati Raj System in the NCT of Delhi was suspended before the commencement of the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992.

Most backward districts

5610. SHRI SOLIPETA RAMACHANDRA REDDY: Will the Minister of RURAL DEVELOPMENT be pleased to state:

(a) the steps taken to identify the most backward districts in the country and the really poor rural communities; and

(b) the strategies proposed to deal with their problems to make them prosperous due to rural development activities?

THE MINISTER OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT (SHRI SUNDER LAL PATWA): (a) A Committee (headed by Principal Adviser, Planning Commission) was constituted in 1997 to, *inter alia,* identify the 100 most backward/poorest districts in the country. The broad parameters adopted by the Committee to analyze the causes of backwardness, included indicators of deprivation (poverty ratio) and social and economic infrastructure. The 100 most backward/poorest districts identified by the Committee included 38 districts in Bihar, 19 districts in Madhya Pradesh, 17 districts in Uttar Pradesh, 10 districts in Maharashtra, 4 districts each in Orissa and West Bengal, 2 districts each in Rajasthan and Sikkim and 1 district each in Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka and Dadra & Nagar Haveli.

(b) The Ministry of Rural Development are implementing programmes pertaining, *inter alia,* to poverty alleviation, employment generation, infrastructure developement, wartershed schemes, social security and land reforms, with a view to improve the quality of life in the rural areas and assist people below the poverty line. These programmes are being closely monitored and are being evaluated from time to time. The programmes implemented for the development of backward areas have helped in improving the living conditions in these areas.